

# The Adaptations of Augie March: A Novel by Saul Bellow, A Play by David Auburn, A Production by Charles Newell, An Exhibit by Special Collections and Court Theatre

April 29, 2019 through August 30, 2019

## Exhibit Text

### Exhibit Introductory Panel:

In 1953, Saul Bellow published *The Adventures of Augie March*, the story of a young immigrant coming of age in Chicago and discovering his identity as a writer. The novel launched Bellow's reputation and established the future Nobel Laureate's literary renown.

In 2015, Court Theatre Artistic Director Charles Newell commissioned the Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright David Auburn, AB '91, to adapt *The Adventures of Augie March* for Court's stage. The same year, the Special Collections Research Center began processing and cataloguing Saul Bellow's papers for use by scholars, students, and researchers.

*The Adaptations of Augie March* examines the successive transformations of Bellow's original text in the hands of playwright Auburn and his collaborator Newell as they worked closely with a team of theatre artists—including a set designer, costume designer, choreographer and dialect coach—to bring the May 2019 world premiere of *The Adventures of Augie March* to life at Court Theatre.

Among the manuscripts and artifacts on display here are early handwritten drafts of Bellow's novel and his later revisions; original drafts of David Auburn's play; Charles Newell's artistic notes and plans for establishing the world of the play; costume designer Sally Dolembó's drawings and sketches; the mind-bending work of shadow puppetry collective Manual Cinema, commissioned by Court to generate the play's special effects; and John Culbert's minimalist, non-literal design for a set capable of evoking places as disparate as Depression-era Chicago, the mountains of Mexico, post-WWII Italy, and a lifeboat on the open ocean.

The exhibit invites visitors to step into the world of Augie March—as Bellow imagined it, as Auburn adapted it, and as Newell envisioned it for the stage. *The Adaptations of Augie March* illuminates how writers and theatre artists work together to create and build the world of a play, and how they bring that world to full realization using the tools and elements of live performance.

## Dramaturgical Essay

### FIRST TO KNOCK, FIRST ADMITTED: *The Adventures of Saul Bellow*

#### **Immigrant**

Saul Bellow arrived with his family in Chicago on July 4, 1924, smuggled by bootleggers across the border from Canada. He was nine years old. He would remain an “illegal alien”—we would now say, “undocumented immigrant”—until the age of 27.

Bellow was born in 1915 in Lachine, Quebec. His parents were Russian Jews. They had originally come to Canada to flee anti-Semitic violence and political persecution in their home city of St. Petersburg, Russia.

The Bellow family arrived on American soil two short months after the U. S. Congress passed the 1924 Immigration Restriction Act, a drastic and sweeping revision of federal immigration policy. The new law slammed the door on a mass of humanity that had been flowing to America since the late 19th-century, ending the greatest era of unrestricted migration to the United States in its history. From 1880 to 1924, waves of newcomers, primarily from Southern and Eastern Europe, powered the rapid growth of Chicago. The city’s population quadrupled in thirty years’ time, growing from 500,000 residents in 1880 to over 2 million in 1910. By 1924, when Bellow took up residence with his family in the Russian Jewish enclave of Humboldt Park, 70% of Chicago residents were foreign-born or the children of foreign-born parents.

His whole life, Bellow retained a vivid impression of the first day he spent in America: July 4, 1924. He recalled his nine-year-old self thinking the fireworks, flags, bunting and parades of Independence Day were for him, meant to hail the promise of his new life in America.

But the 1924 Immigration Restriction Act told a less welcoming story. The law was informed by the burgeoning eugenics movement, which maintained that peoples from Southern and Eastern Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa were genetically inferior to those from Northern and Western Europe. The 1924 Act accordingly slashed immigration rates from targeted nations by 98%, barring admission to Russian Jews, Poles, Hungarians, Bulgarians, Italians, Greeks, Mexicans, Chinese, Turks, Armenians, Lithuanians and Africans, among many others. Conspicuously, the 1924 Act left the door open to migrants from Great Britain, Ireland, Denmark, Germany, Sweden and Norway.

Eugenicists celebrated the 1924 Act as a measure that would “preserve the purity of American stock” by welcoming immigrants only “of higher intelligence,” who thus presented “the best material for American citizenship”. The now-excluded categories of people, it was believed, had “made an excessive contribution to our insane, criminal and other socially inadequate classes.” A related federal act prohibited entry to “epileptics and insane persons; paupers; professional beggars; persons likely to become a public charge; persons afflicted with a loathsome or dangerous disease; and persons who have committed a felony or other crime involving moral turpitude.” Polygamists, prostitutes and those with “mental or physical defects which might affect their ability to earn a living” were also banned.

A natural reading of *The Adventures of Augie March* views it as Bellow's artistic response to the contradictions inherent in the historical moment of his arrival in this country.

The story Bellow scrawled, beginning in 1947, in a succession of battered notebooks—notebooks now housed in the Special Collections Research Center—charts the coming of age of a young undocumented immigrant amidst the foreign-born multitudes of Chicago. Augie, Bellow's narrator, struggles amongst the plenty and poverty of the city toward self-knowledge. He achieves it at last in discovering his identity as an American writer.

Bellow's novel offers a rejoinder to the premise that a person's country of origin, physical form or natural endowments determine their fitness for American life. The characters peopling *The Adventures of Augie March* hail from the countries of origin marked for exclusion by the 1924 Immigration Restriction Act: they are Russian Jews, they are Mexican, they are Hungarian and Polish, they are Czech and Italian. They may be paralyzed, blind, physically disabled, or "insane." They are relegated to the poverty-stricken and criminal margins of the city's teeming social world. Invariably they are the "socially inferior." But they are unmistakably American, and they contribute to the vibrant day-to-day of an unmistakably American city.

### **Writer**

Augie is not quite Bellow's alter ego. But his life echoes aspects of Bellow's life, and his impressions and experiences are often artful silhouettes of Bellow's own. Above all, the language Bellow uses to recount Augie's adventures bears the unique and unmistakable stamp of the city that shaped him.

As a child coming of age on the streets of Chicago, Bellow absorbed a rich inheritance. His earliest spoken languages were Russian and Yiddish. He picked up English on Chicago's West Side, where he played alongside the children of recently-arrived Poles, Italians, Swedes, Greeks, Hungarians, Czechs and Romanians. Bellow remembered these immigrant youths being as eager as he was to talk about distinctly American things: "baseball, prizefights, speakeasies, graft, jazz, crap games, gang wars." As an adolescent, Bellow drew inspiration from soapbox preachers on Division Street, vendors hawking wares in the Maxwell Street Market, and speeches by orators, labor leaders and poets who assembled for debates in Bughouse Square, the park beside the Newberry Library. He haunted the stacks of multiple branches of the Chicago Public Library, where classic texts of world literature were freely available to him, the son of a low-wage employee at a kosher bakery on Augusta Avenue.

These multitudinous influences are evident in the language Augie March uses to tell his story. Inflected with Yiddish rhythms, salted with slang and idiomatic speech, packed with interludes of heightened poetic phrasing and allusions to high culture, Augie's narrative voice immerses readers in the colloquial language of the Chicago streets. One of the signal achievements of *The Adventures of Augie March*, according to the writer Philip Roth, was how the novel raised "the language you spoke, the American argot you heard on the street," to the level of high literature.

Augie's narrative voice even keeps pace with the evolution of Chicago street speech over three decades. As the chapters proceed the music of the language shifts from the rhythms of the Prohibition-era vernacular, to the minor key changes of the Great Depression in the 1930s, to the grander tones of the 1940s heralding the post-war economic boom.

The idea for a novel that channeled the music of Chicago vernacular speech came to Bellow when he was living in Paris in 1947. One morning, watching city workers opening the valves of hydrants

to allow the gushing water to sweep clean the pavements, he asked himself, “why not have as much freedom of movement as this running water?” The flowing hydrants conjured the sudden memory, Bellow said, of “a handsome, free-wheeling kid from childhood whose surname was August, and who used to yell when we were playing, ‘I got a scheme!’” Recreating the energy and brio of his long-ago Chicago friend was the start of *Augie March*: “Subject and language appeared at the same moment—I was enriched with words,” Bellow recalled. “I found myself with magical suddenness writing the first paragraph. It rushed out of me.” The novel’s language came to his mind so swiftly, he remembered, “All I had to do was be there with buckets to catch it.”

### **Mythologist**

While Bellow transmuted the phrasings and cadences of Chicago’s immigrant residents into a new kind of heightened literary language, he also likened their personhood to figures of myth and history. The cast of characters populating Augie’s street-level world are compared to gods and heroes of Greek mythology, or heroes from the annals of world history.

Simon, Augie’s body-building older brother, is afflicted with bouts of insanity like his mythological correlate, Hercules. The orating, wheelchair-using real estate broker William Einhorn is at once equated with Hephaestus, the blacksmith God of Invention, and President Franklin Roosevelt. Grandma Lausch, physically infirm but ruthlessly tyrannical, is compared to Emperor Timur, the 14th-century conqueror of Asia and heir to Genghis Khan. Rebecca March, Augie’s blind, incapacitated mother stands with the many mortal women in Greek mythology who, seduced and abandoned by Zeus, give birth to demigods. Augie himself is likened to Alcibiades, legendary orator of 5th-century B.C.E. Athens, beloved by the gods for his charisma and gift of self-expression. Bellow suggests gods and geniuses walk the streets of Chicago, reincarnated as immigrants and workers. With immigrants from the “old world” no longer free to enter America, this promise is forestalled. Bellow begins the novel with a quote from Heraclitus, the 5th-century B.C.E. philosopher: Heraclitus says that “a man’s character is his fate”— not race, ethnicity or physical endowments.

The publication of *The Adventures of Augie March* in 1953, when he was 38 years old, launched Saul Bellow’s reputation as a novelist and established the future Nobel Laureate’s literary renown. Congress, meanwhile, would not end the exclusionary quota system imposed by the 1924 Immigration Restriction Act until 1965. The opening lines of *Augie March* --*I am an American, Chicago born—Chicago, that somber city—and go at things as I have taught myself, freestyle, and will make the record in my own way: first to knock, first admitted; sometimes an innocent knock, sometimes a not so innocent—*stand as Bellow’s testament to the liberating potential of the American immigrant experience.

--Nora Titone

## **Exhibit Acknowledgements**

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## CASE: “I AM AN AMERICAN, CHICAGO BORN”

### *A young immigrant arrives in Chicago*

Nine-year-old Saul Bellow arrived in Chicago on July 4, 1924, when bootleggers smuggled the boy and members of his family across the border from Canada. He would remain an illegal alien in the United States until 1943, when he became a naturalized citizen. Saul Bellow was born in 1915 in Lachine, Quebec to Russian Jewish parents, Abraham and Lescha Bellow, who themselves came to Canada in 1913, fleeing anti-Semitic violence and political persecution in their home city of St. Petersburg, Russia. For the rest of his life, Bellow retained a vivid impression of the first day he spent in the city of Chicago. He remembered believing that the fireworks, flags, bunting and parades of the 1924 Independence Day celebrations were intended to welcome him, and to hail the promise of his new life in America.

### *A novel and a fictional character born from Bellow's experiences in the city*

Bellow later said his childhood on the streets of Chicago supplied the electric charge of inspiration for *The Adventures of Augie March*. Bellow's widow, Janis Freedman Bellow, connects the exuberance and brio of the novel's language to the intoxicating freedom and creative energy Bellow first discovered as new arrival in this city. When Bellow set out to write the story of a young immigrant coming of age in Chicago, he adapted aspects of his own life when crafting the narrative. Augie March is neither Bellow's alter ego nor his double, but rather, he is a character whose adventures—through the alchemy of the author's literary imagination—distantly echo aspects of Bellow's life, and whose impressions and substantive experiences at times are artful silhouettes of Bellow's own. As Janis Freedman Bellow has remarked, “When pieces of [Bellow's] life find their way into his work, there is always something magical about the manner in which they are lifted from the past or present, kneaded and shaped and subtly transformed into narrative. But this is not cutting and pasting of actual events: Saul wields a wand, not a scissors.”

*The genesis of* The Adventures of Augie March

Saul Bellow began writing the novel when he was living in Paris on a Guggenheim Fellowship. One spring morning in 1949, he recalled, the sight of Parisian street sweepers releasing the valves on water hydrants to send a flood across the cobblestones suddenly unlocked his imagination: “I remember saying to myself, ‘Well, why not...have as much freedom of movement as this running water...I seem then to have gone back to childhood in my thoughts and remembered a pal of mine whose surname was August—a handsome, free-wheeling kid who used to yell out when we were playing checkers, ‘I got a scheme!’” Thinking of this childhood friend, and of the Chicago he had known growing up in the 1920s-1930s, Bellow conceived of the novel in an instant: “Subject and language appeared at the same moment. The language was immediately present—I can’t say how it happened, but I was suddenly enriched with words and phrases...I found myself with magical suddenness writing a first paragraph...It rushed out of me. I was turned on like a hydrant in summer.” The notebooks Bellow used to catch this flood of inspired language are found throughout this exhibit.

**Certificate of Naturalization, 1943**

Saul Bellow Papers

**U.S. Passport, 1951**

Saul Bellow Papers

**Affidavit**

Saul Bellow Papers

This affidavit is witnessed by Samuel Freifeld, Bellow’s classmate and intimate friend from Chicago’s Tuley High School. Freifeld’s father, Ben Freifeld, served as a model for the character William Einhorn in *The Adventures of Augie March*.

**Typescript Fragment, *The Adventures of Augie March***

Chapter 1, pages 1-2

**Zachary Leader**

*The Life of Saul Bellow: Love and Strife*

New York: Knopf, 2015

PS3503.E4488Z736 2015 c.2 ArcMon

*The William Vaughn Moody Collection in American Literature*

Saul Bellow and family, photographed in Lachine, Quebec in 1918, six years before they crossed the border illegally to take up residence in Chicago. From left to right, four-year-old Saul, his mother Lescha, his brothers Maury and Sam, and his sister Jane.

[Reproduction]

**Photo, 1920**

*Getty Images*

An Independence Day parade processes across the Michigan Avenue Bridge, July 4, 1920. Saul Bellow witnessed a similar city-wide festival when he, his mother and siblings first arrived in America, disembarking from a train at Chicago’s Harrison Street Station on the Fourth of July, 1924.

[Reproduction]

**Photo, 1928**

*Chicago History Museum, DN-0086118*

Children play in water spraying onto the street from an open hydrant in Chicago's West Town, 1928. Saul Bellow told his friend Philip Roth that the sight of a hydrant gushing water onto the streets of Paris in 1949 so vividly brought to mind memories of his freewheeling Chicago childhood, that the image unlocked his imagination and inspired him to write *The Adventures of Augie March*.

[Reproduction]

**Photo, c. 1915**

*Chicago History Museum, in Culter's Jewish Chicago F548.9.J5C88 2000 Gen*

Adolescent boxers in training strike pugnacious poses outside the Chicago Hebrew Institute Gymnasium. Scenes like this offer a glimpse of the social world that welcomed young Saul Bellow when he and his family settled in Chicago's Humboldt Park in 1924.

[Reproduction]

**Photo, c. 1915**

*Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, in Culter's Jews of Chicago F548.9.J5C870 1996 Gen*

Girls participate in a dance class at the Jewish Training School of Chicago, a thriving institution founded in 1888 to provide English lessons, vocational training and arts instruction to the children of Russian Jewish immigrants on Chicago's West Side.

## CASE: NOBEL

**Day Planner**

Bellow's day planner with Nobel Prize ceremony marked on December 10, 1976

[Reproduction]

**Newspaper Clipping**

United Press International

December 11, 1976

Saul Bellow Papers

**Booklet**

"Translation of the Speeches at the Nobel Festival 1976"

Saul Bellow Papers

## CASE: HOW CHICAGO SHAPED BELLOW AS A WRITER

The Viking Press published *The Adventures of Augie March* in 1953 to widespread acclaim. One of the novel's achievements, Philip Roth observed, was raising "the language you spoke, the American argot you heard on the street," to the level of high literature. Bellow's Augie, like Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn, is the narrator of his own life story. Bellow said the shape of his novel was like "a widening spiral that begins in the ghetto and the slum and spreads into the greater world, and there

Augie comes to the fore because of the multiplication of people around him and the greater difficulty of experience.” Though Augie travels far—his story leaps from Mexico to New York, Italy and a lifeboat in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean—he begins in Chicago, and the language he uses to recount his adventures bears the unique and unmistakable stamp of his city of origin. Inflected with Yiddish rhythms, salted with slang and idiomatic speech, packed with interludes of heightened poetic phrasing and allusions to high and low culture, Augie’s narrative voice immerses readers in the colloquial lyricism of the Chicago streets. As the novel’s spiral widens, and Bellow’s protagonist gains in age and experience, Augie’s language keeps pace with the evolution of Chicago speech over three decades, evoking the vernacular of the Prohibition era, tracking the minor key changes heralded by the Great Depression, and finding the tonal shift that marked the years of the post-war economic boom.

As the manuscripts and oral history interviews displayed indicate, Bellow absorbed a rich inheritance as a writer in the years he spent coming of age in Chicago.

Though his earliest spoken languages were Russian and Yiddish, he picked up English on the streets of Chicago’s West Side, where he played alongside the children of Poles, Italians, Swedes, Greeks, Hungarians, Czechs and Romanians. Bellow remembered his playmates being as eager as he was to ditch their native tongues and talk exclusively on American themes--“baseball, prizefights, speakeasies, graft, jazz, crap games, gang wars.” The adolescent Bellow heard soapbox preachers on Division Street, tuned his ear to the cacophony of vendors hawking wares in the Maxwell Street Market, and drank in the words of orators, labor leaders and poets who assembled for debates in Bughouse Square, the tree-shaded park beside the Newberry Library. He haunted the stacks of multiple branches of the Chicago Public Library system, where classic texts of world literature were freely available to him, the son of a low-wage employee at the Imperial Bakery on Augusta Avenue. Later, as a student at Tuley High School in the 1930s, Bellow and his classmates toiled on the editorial boards of school literary magazines and newspapers, churning out ambitious works of original fiction, poetry and essays.

Bellow published two novels prior to *Augie*, *The Dangling Man* in 1944 and *The Victim* in 1947. The language of those early works in no way resembled what he achieved with *Augie*. Zachary Leader, Bellow’s biographer, explains that the novelist “knew that he was doing something new with *The Adventures of Augie March*. What he discovered with *Augie*, Bellow later told Philip Roth, was “that I could write whatever I wished, and that what I wished was to get into words the appearance of a gallery of personalities—characters like Grandma Lausch or Einhorn the fertile cripple, or Augie March himself. Years of notation ended in the discovery of a language that made everything possible.”

### **Saul Bellow**

*The Adventures of Augie March*

New York: Viking, 1953

PS3503.E436A67 1953 c.7 Rare

616686217

[Reproduction, detail]

### **Map**

*Cram's City Guide Map of Chicago*, c. 1926

G4104.C6 Regenstein Map Collection



## **Speech, 1972**

“Chicago and American Culture: One Writer’s View”

Saul Bellow Papers

These are the first two pages of a speech Saul Bellow gave at Chicago Public Library.

## **Holograph Draft, undated**

“How, In the City of Chicago does a Young Person Become a Writer”

Saul Bellow Papers

[Reproduction]

## **Photo, undated**

*Bughouse Square*

Washington Square Park, Chicago

Wikimedia Commons

## iPad: Oral Histories

Recorded oral history interviews with Julius Echeles and David Peltz, Saul Bellow’s high school classmates who grew up with him in Humboldt Park

### **David Peltz Interview (00:00-1:07:13)**

00:16 - 04:16 - Peltz's childhood and early recollections of Saul Bellow

04:17 - 06:51 - Reading books at a young age

06:52 - 10:19 - The Freifeld family

10:21 - 14:15 - Saul Bellow and Nelson Algren

14:19 - 15:35 - Tuley High School

15:35 - 16:34 - Bellow's family after the death of his mother

16:34 - 18:01 - Bellow's family on his career as a writer

18:03 - 18:22 - Bellow and Jewish identity

20:03 - 22:31 - Bellow as a Chicago Writer

### **Julius Echeles Interview (1:07:13 - end)**

1:07:13 - 1:09:10 - Recollections of Tuley High

1:09:11 - 1:11:47 - The success of the Dangling Man

1:11:47 - 1:18:22 - Tuley High School and the Depression

1:18:23 - 1:21:01 - Demographics of Humboldt Park

1:21:02 - 1:22:56 - Extracurricular activities in high school

1:22:57 - 1:26:31 - Echeles' childhood

## CASE: *AUGIE MARCH* 1953 PUBLICATION & REVIEWS

The publication of *The Adventures of Augie March* by the Viking Press in 1953 won Saul Bellow national recognition and an immense public readership, launching him to fame and fortune. Reviews of the novel in major publications hailed Bellow as an American literary talent worthy of comparison

to Mark Twain, Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, and John Dos Passos. The novel sold briskly. In 1954, *Augie* was awarded the National Book Award for Fiction. The spotlight of literary celebrity shone brightly on 39-year-old writer Bellow, who had succeeded, he wrote privately to a friend, in “proving that a young man from Chicago had the right to claim the world’s attention.”

### **Layout Proofs, 1953**

*The Adventures of Augie March*

Saul Bellow Papers

### **Letter**

December 11, 1953

Saul Bellow Papers

### ***Saturday Review***

1953

Saul Bellow Papers

Reviewer Harvey Curtis Webster, an English professor at the University of Louisville, likens the experience of reading the Chicago-born language of *Augie* to the feeling of first reading James Joyce’s *Ulysses* in 1922.

### ***Saturday Review***

1953

Saul Bellow Papers

A portrait of Bellow appears on the front cover of the September 19, 1953 issue of *The Saturday Review*.

### **News Clippings**

Saul Bellow Papers

### **Scrapbook**

Saul Bellow Papers

## CASE: TRANSLATIONS OF AUGIE MARCH

### **Contract Envelope**

Saul Bellow Papers

### **Books**

50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition, from Janis Bellow, will add to ArcMon after exhibit

PS3503.E4488A6613 1984 c.2 ArcMon, 61185697, Dobrodružství Augieho Marche /

PS3503.E436A67155 1982 c.1 v. 2 ArcMon, 61126718, Augie March kalandjai :regény

PS3503.E4488A6616 1981 v.1 ArcMon, 82235529, Ōgī māchi no bōken

PS3503.E4488A6616 1981 v.2 ArcMon, 82234966, Ōgī māchi no bōken

PS3503.E4488 A66169 2009 ArcMon, 100444556, As aventuras de Augie March

PS3503.E436A6715 1977 ArcMon, 6127100, Die Abenteuer des Augie March

PS3503.E436A67123 1955 ArcMon, 61126592, En ung Amerikaners eventyr  
PS3503.E436A67185 1953 c.2 ArcMon, 112246663, Augie Marchs aventyr  
PS3503.E436A67155 1982 v.1 ArcMon, 61126770, Augie March kalandjai :regény  
PS3503.E436A6715 2008 ArcMon, 82454268, Die Abenteuer des Augie March :Roman  
PS3503.E436A6714 1959 ArcMon, 61126650, Les Aventures d'Augie March :roman  
PS3503.E436A67173 1965 ArcMon, 61125624, Doživljaji Augie Marcha  
PS3503.E436A6715 1956 ArcMon, 61126523, Die Abenteuer des Augie March :Roman  
PS3503.E436A67135 1975 ArcMon, 61125566, Augie Marchin kiemurat  
PS3503.E436A6714 1977 v.2 ArcMon, 61126838, Les aventures d'Augie March :roman  
PS3503.E436A6714 1977 v.1 ArcMon, 61126845, Les aventures d'Augie March :roman  
PS3503.E436A67185 1975 ArcMon, 61126561, Augie Marchs äventyr  
PS3503.E4488A6618 1994 ArcMon, 81700385, Las aventuras de Augie March  
PS3503.E4488A6615 1966 ArcMon, 81700347, Die Abenteuer des Augie March :Roman  
PS3503.E436A67129 1990 ArcMon, 61127042, De avonturen van Augie March  
dis-PS3503.E436A67175 1961 ArcMon, 61125504, Dogodivščine Augieja Marcha :roman  
PS3503.E436A67 1970 ArcMon, 61126989, The adventures of Augie March

## ANDO CASE: THE EAGLE

### ***LIFE Magazine***

July 4, 1949

*On loan from Court Theatre*

On a visit to Mexico in 1940, Saul Bellow met Daniel and Jule Mannix of Philadelphia, who were vacationing with their unusual pet, an American bald eagle named Aguila. The Mannixes were training Aguila to hunt the wild iguanas that roamed the forests and mountains surrounding Taxco, a popular tourist destination 100 miles southwest of Mexico City. Bellow drew from his vivid memories of the Mannixes and their eagle Aguila when he began writing *The Adventures of Augie March* in 1949; *LIFE Magazine* published this photo essay on the couple and their pet the same year.

### **Notebooks, “The Adventures of Augie March”**

Saul Bellow Papers

These are the notebooks Bellow began writing in while residing in Paris during the spring of 1949, when the idea for *The Adventures of Augie March* first came to him. The words of the novel, he later said, “suddenly...rushed out of me. I was turned on like a hydrant in summer.” The cascade of Bellow’s inspiration may be perceived in the smooth, uninterrupted flow of the handwriting that fills most of these notebooks. The few passages of composition in Bellow’s *Augie March* notebooks that reveal a different pace of writing or that bear signs of heavy revision are those relating to his creation of the eagle, Caligula, who functions as a powerful and mutable metaphor within the world of the novel.

### **“The Adventures of Augie March Notebook 11”**

Saul Bellow Papers

### **“The Adventures of Augie March Notebook 12”**

Saul Bellow Papers

**Typescript**  
Saul Bellow Papers

**Script**

*The Adventures of Augie March*  
*On loan from David Auburn*

In the hands of playwright David Auburn, Bellow's eagle is transformed. Caligula appears before Augie at the climax of Auburn's play, and engages him in a final, revelatory conversation.

**THE ART OF ADAPTING DAVID AUBURN'S EAGLE**

The task of designing the character of the eagle from the play *The Adventures of Augie March* was appealing to Manual Cinema because, in a lot of ways, it is an almost impossible task of adaptation. The eagle is a feature of a novel that was not originally intended to be put on stage. The actual mechanics of getting an eagle on stage, an eagle that the audience identifies with, and that contributes to the themes and motifs of the story, is a very tall order—and that challenge was attractive to us. Also, it is not like we are designing the animal puppet for Broadway's *King Kong*: the eagle in David Auburn's play is not there for pure spectacle. Rather, the eagle has a subtle, interesting way of interacting with Augie's character, and the eagle shadows Augie's journey in the story in deeply meaningful way. Auburn thoroughly digested the character of the eagle from the novel, and he deploys the eagle in his script in ways that work theatrically and metaphorically. So, in addition to bringing Bellow's eagle to the stage, we knew we would be bringing Auburn's eagle to life in the production. Taking on a design element that was both a practical challenge and that served as a salient metaphor in the play is exactly the kind of work we love to do.

We also knew that Auburn wrote not just one eagle, but a couple of different eagles, into his script. Auburn's first eagle is the literal eagle, Caligula, a pet that Augie and Thea purchase and adopt. The second eagle in the play is a metaphorical eagle, one which serves as the internal narrative voice of Augie, and at times maybe even as the voice of destiny in the play. From the very beginning of the adaptation process we knew we had many eagles at hand, and therefore we needed different design approaches for each one.

—Drew Dir, Manual Cinema

[Reproduction, enlargement]

**Sketches**

Eagle Caligula concept sketches  
*The Adventures of Augie March*  
Manual Cinema

[Reproduction, enlargement]

**Sketch**

Eagle hunt, part 4 scene 6  
*The Adventures of Augie March*  
Manual Cinema

**DESIGNING A LITERAL EAGLE**

For the literal eagle, our task essentially was to create a new cast member for the play. We needed to put a new character on stage who was not an actor, but rather a living, breathing puppet with a

recognizable personality. Bellow imbued Caligula the Eagle with a specific identity and presence. We wanted to capture Caligula's particular personality, but we also wanted to create the feeling that the actress playing Thea truly has brought a live animal on stage with her. When you are in the room with a live animal, the terms of engagement change and shift. We wanted to create a Caligula the Eagle puppet that would make an audience feel, as soon as the eagle puppet was brought on stage, that the energy in the room had completely transformed, and that maybe even the relationships between the characters on stage had transformed as well.

—Drew Dir, Manual Cinema

[Reproduction, enlargement]

### **Sketches**

Eagle Caligula

*The Adventures of Augie March*

Manual Cinema

## **DESIGNING A METAPHORICAL EAGLE**

For the metaphorical eagle, we used techniques of shadow puppetry, dance and choreography to create a tableau or stage picture—a living and breathing shadow—that is at once Caligula the Eagle while also being all the members of the ensemble, including Augie and Grandma Lausch. For this design gesture, our task was not to create a new cast member; rather, the assignment was to create the visual metaphor for the climax of the play. Auburn has written a succession of moments into this play in which the reality of a scene suddenly shifts, and the scene becomes something heightened, no longer a literal dramatic scene. These moments of shift occur when a character begins to speak the original narrative language from *The Adventures of Augie March*. These moments should feel like a welling up of self-knowledge, or of wisdom, coming from inside of Augie. And these heightened scenes are strung together throughout the play like pearls on a necklace, building toward this final scene, when an image of the eagle comes to Augie at his lowest point, and shares a conversation with him. For this climactic moment, the ensemble coalesces together and becomes one moving, shifting entity in the shape of an eagle. Together, they represent everything that Augie has experienced, all the people he has met, the full sum of what has happened to him throughout the play, and all the knowledge he has gained.

—Drew Dir, Manual Cinema

[Reproduction, enlargement]

### **Sketches**

Story board panels

*The Adventures of Augie March*

Manual Cinema

## **STAGING THE EAGLE'S HUNT FOR A GIANT IGUANA**

There was another iteration of the eagle we needed to bring to realization. This iteration is contained in an elaborate and pivotal scene in Bellow's novel that Auburn included in his adaptation, where Caligula the Eagle is taken out for his first iguana hunt in the mountains of Mexico. In this scene, Caligula is supposed to hunt and capture a giant iguana on his own. This was the most challenging scene to bring to life because it requires an expansion of time and space that is really difficult to achieve in the theatre. What we have done is to create a cinematic projection space on stage where the actors use a combination of their own bodies, shadow puppets and two-dimensional miniature

objects to create a little film, a brief nature documentary, of Caligula the Eagle trying and ultimately failing to capture his first iguana.

In our short eagle film, the story that is told is a bit of a tragedy. For this mood and emotion to come through, it is necessary for us to be in Caligula the Eagle's point of view and, at the same time, to occupy the point of view of Augie and Thea, who are desperately hoping that all this goes well. There definitely is an element of suspense and drama involved, but also, by virtue of the media that we are using, there also is a dreamlike and hallucinatory quality to this interlude. Caligula's failure to capture the iguana is really a turning point in Augie's journey in the play. It is a moment in the play where we drop a big curtain across the stage to hold the shadow projections, and the audience will see imagery unlike anything they have seen up to that point in the play. So, this is a really heightened moment of theatrically and we want to put the audience in a completely new space.

—Drew Dir, Manual Cinema

## **Bio**

### **MANUAL CINEMA**

Performance collective, design studio, and film/video production company, Manual Cinema, was founded in 2010 by UChicago alumni, Drew Dir and Sarah Fornace, in collaboration with Ben Kauffman, Julia Miller, and Kyle Vegter.

Manual Cinema combines handmade shadow puppetry, cinematic techniques, and innovative sound and music to create immersive stories that transport audiences. Using vintage overhead projectors, multiple screens, puppets, actors, live feed cameras, multi-channel sound design, and a live music ensemble, Manual Cinema transforms the experience of attending the cinema and imbues it with liveness, ingenuity, and theatricality. The resulting parade of images is fantastical and feels at once strange and familiar, new and old, real and dreamlike.

An integral part of the Manual Cinema experience is the combination of the backstage and on-stage spaces, which means that an audience can see, not only the projected images, but the means by which the actors create these images. Audience members can even interact with the actors and puppets after shows. The *Chicago Tribune* remarked that Manual Cinema's open approach to storytelling shows that "you can still fall in love with a fictional character, a puppet, even when you see all the strings and learn how they are pulled." For Manual Cinema, *how* you tell a story matters as much as the story itself.

Added the week of June 24, 2019:

### **3-D Caligula Eagle Puppet**

Manual Cinema, 2019

*Reeds, thermal plastics (Worbla and Shaplock), glass, synthetic fur, carbon fiber*

The 3-D Caligula Eagle Puppet was worn and manipulated by Chaon Cross, the actor portraying Thea in *The Adventures of Augie March*. Cross controlled the puppet by placing her right arm into Caligula's head and body, and her left arm into the leather gauntlet that is Caligula's perch and stabilizing base. Manual Cinema built the body of

the puppet from lightweight reeds, and used thermal plastic, synthetic fur and carbon fiber to create the beak, talons and feathers.

## **2-D Eagle and Iguana Shadow Puppets**

Manual Cinema, 2019

*Foam core, acetate, fabric, sticks*

These shadow puppets were designed to enact the Iguana Hunt in Act III of the play. Manual Cinema drew the storyboard narrative of the hunt, then fashioned a series of shadow puppets from foam core and fabric to replicate the action. They chose flexible materials, foam core and fabric, that would allow actors to wiggle, bend, move and manipulate the shadow puppets in ways that appeared fluid and organic in performance.

## CASE: DAVID AUBURN PULITZER

### **Telegram, 2001**

Pulitzer Prize

*On loan from David Auburn*

### **Theatre Programs, 2013**

*Proof* performed at the Court Theatre, directed by Charles Newell

*On loan from Court Theatre*

David Auburn, AB '91, and Court Theatre Artistic Director Charles Newell met in 2013 when Newell directed a critically-acclaimed production of *Proof* at Court. Auburn was thrilled by what he described as Newell's "fluid, non-naturalistic" approach: "I loved Charlie's production, and was excited by the kind of thing he might like to do next." When Auburn proposed writing a new play based on *The Adventures of Augie March*, Newell jumped at the opportunity to collaborate, and a creative partnership was born. In 2015, when Court Theatre secured the rights from Bellow's literary estate to commission a stage adaptation, Auburn began the work of distilling the novel into a dramatic form.

## CASE: DAVID AUBURN

[pages 1-4 of lifeboat scene]

### **Script, 2018-19**

*The Adventures of Augie March*

### **STARTING WITH A SHIPWRECK**

"The book keeps pitting Augie, who is a kind of searcher, against people of great certainty, characters who have monumental worldviews and monomanias and obsessions, and who are

convinced of the direction that their life and other people's lives should take. Augie meets Einhorn, a local mobster, autodidact and amateur philosopher who guides him for a portion of the book; he meets Thea, a woman he falls in love with who comes up with a scheme that they should go to Mexico and hunt iguanas together with an eagle. Late in the book, Augie is shipwrecked in the Atlantic Ocean with a ship's carpenter, Basteshaw, who is kind of the ultimate deranged dreamer intent on shaping Augie's destiny. Though it happens near the end of the book, the shipwreck seemed like a good place to start. The play opens with Augie trapped on a lifeboat with this madman, Basteshaw. Then, we go back in time to see how Augie got there. Before the play is over, we return to the lifeboat to see how Augie gets out of his predicament. Hopefully, by the time we return, we'll understand more about how these powerful figures have held Augie in thrall throughout his life, why he is always in search of the next one, and maybe why this one will be the last one." – David Auburn

[pages 53-55, Part One, Scene 11]

### **Script, 2018-19**

*The Adventures of Augie March*

### **MAKING THE NOVEL'S MUTE CHARACTERS SPEAK**

"There are a number of mute or semi-mute characters in the book. There is Augie's brother, George, who rarely uses language. There is Augie's mother, Rebecca, who is addled in some way that renders her inarticulate. There are characters who don't speak English. There is an eagle who does not speak but who is very vivid character. So, I thought, let us let these mute characters very occasionally voice the insights or epiphanies that Augie himself is experiencing internally, but does not yet have the ability to articulate. So, in the script, that is the way Bellow's text appears: as italicized words in the mouths of non-speaking or inarticulate characters. Georgie, Augie's mute brother suddenly speaks with the eloquence Augie himself is developing. Quite how these interludes of quotation from the novel are communicated on stage--whether it happens with one actor speaking or many actors speaking chorally, or with the lights changing—well, that's Charlie's problem to solve as the director. This is a device I'm excited about. I think it will help an audience feel the complexity of Bellow's language while illuminating how Augie himself understands his circumstances." – David Auburn

### **Saul Bellow**

*Las aventuras de Augie March*

Buenos Aires: Editorial Guillermo Kraft, [1962]

PS3503.E436A6718 1962 ArcMon

61126958

### **Photo**

David Auburn

Photo by Joe Mazza, 2019

### **Bio**

David Auburn

Playwright and screenwriter David Auburn's credits include *The Adventures of Augie March*, based on the Bellow novel (Court Theatre, 2019); *Lost Lake* (Manhattan Theatre Club, 2014); *The Columnist* (Manhattan Theater Club/Broadway, 2012), and *Proof*.



Auburn won the 2001 Pulitzer Prize, Tony Award, and New York Drama Critics Circle Award for *Proof*.

Auburn's film credits include *The Girl in the Park* (writer/director), *Georgetown*, and *The Lake House*.

Auburn's stage directing credits include *Long Day's Journey into Night* (Court Theatre); *The Petrified Forest*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Anna Christie*, *A Delicate Balance*, *Period of Adjustment*, and *Sick* (Berkshire Theatre Group); and the Off-Broadway world premiere of Michael Weller's *Side Effects* (MCC).

Auburn is a graduate of the University of Chicago, AB '91, a current Neubauer Collegium Fellow, and a former Guggenheim Fellow. He lives in New York City.

## Quotes

### **Auburn on the Art of Adaptation**

I had a number of impulses when I started adapting the novel. One was the feeling that it was overflowing with great roles for actors. There are hundreds of characters in the book, and the language with which they speak is realistic and earthy and magical and exaggerated. The idea of that language in actors' mouths excited me. I also wanted audiences to have the same feeling seeing the play as reading the book, the feeling of overflowing energy and exuberance. I was fascinated to learn that writing this book had had an apparently liberating effect on Bellow as a writer, that he discovered an exuberance and a humor and a way of encompassing the world in this book that were new to him. When you read the book, you feel someone discovering how widely they can spread their arms. I wanted the play to feel like that.

### **Auburn on the Challenge of Adapting Bellow's Novel for the Stage**

One big problem was structure. I always knew that I would have to make a very careful selection of the hundreds of incidents and characters in the book. The three-hour play could only accommodate some of them, and I wanted to get enough of them in there to preserve a sense of an epic. The novel is a picaresque, a series of incidents that acquires meaning by virtue of the language that Augie uses to talk about his life. Augie, a kind of version of Bellow, is narrating his own life from early childhood, but even as a kid he is using incredibly elevated, allusive, cascading, emotional language. From the first page of the book, you ask the question, 'How does a desperately poor, Humboldt Park immigrant Jewish kid learn to talk about his world in this way, and how does he become the person who would narrate this book you're reading?' That's the plot of the novel, and that's enough to keep you going until the last page. But theater operates differently, and it requires a different form. Figuring out a structure for the play that tells the audience, 'This is what you're going to see tonight, this is the shape of the journey you're going to take tonight,' became a really important thing.

### **Auburn on Using Text from Bellow's Novel in the Script**

The other challenge was how to get Bellow's language into the play. If you simply tell the story, if you just dramatize the incidents Augie is experiencing, how do you get the wonderful merit of his language into the play and on the stage. I knew I did not want to a script where actors were leaving the world of the play and turning to the audience and reciting chunks of the novel. I didn't want to do that. I wanted to keep it very active, and I think that we have found some really interesting ways of doing that.

## CASE: CHARLES NEWELL

### A DIRECTOR'S IMAGINATION

#### *THE PROCESS OF BRINGING AUBURN'S PLAY TO LIFE*

As Charles Newell explored the possibilities for staging Auburn's script, he was drawn to the visionary work of the pioneering German dancer and choreographer Pina Bausch (1940-2009). Bausch's signature technique—forged in decades of practice and experimentation with her legendary dance company, Tanztheater Wuppertal—fused elements of theatre, dance and German expressionism into a new dramatic form. Newell turned to Bausch's techniques to unlock the performative possibilities of the interludes of Bellow's language—the “Bellow music,” as Newell would say—that playwright Auburn placed throughout the play. These excerpts from the novel are spoken by characters who otherwise are voiceless, or in some way lack power or agency. Newell believed these rare moments of “Bellow music” should unfold in a heightened theatrical way; consequently, Bausch's theories of performance became one of many useful tools Newell employed while devising the aesthetic of his production.

To fuel Newell's creative process, Court Theatre Executive Director Angel Ysaguirre invited two principal dancers from Bausch's Tanztheater Wuppertal to Chicago in February 2019 to conduct a performance workshop with Newell and the actors in the *Augie March* company. Pascal Merighi and Thusnelda Mercy introduced the cast to Bausch's theories and methods.

Pictured at right, Merighi and Mercy lead the *Augie March* actors in exercises aiming to explore the emotions and intentions that are the wellsprings of physical gesture, the universal language of human expression. As Pina Bausch famously explained, “I'm not interested in how people move, but in what moves them.”

Newell's notes from Merighi and Mercy's performance workshop, below right, offer a glimpse into the concepts and ideas he and the company used to devise a set of movement exercises.

#### **Director's Notes, March 2019**

Charles Newell's list of prompts for dancers

*On loan from Court Theatre*

#### **Director's Notes, March 2019**

Notes by director Charles Newell

*On loan from Court Theatre*

#### **Script**

Charles Newell's production script annotated with director's notes  
*On loan from Court Theatre*

**Royd Clinenhaga (ed.)**

*The Pina Bausch Sourcebook: The Making of Tanztheater*

Routledge: New York, 2013

*On loan from Court Theatre*

**Royd Clinenhaga**

*Pina Bausch: 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*

Routledge: New York, 2018

*On loan from Court Theatre*

[Parisian street scene hydrant/gutter]

[Reproduction]

**Photo, c. 1934**

René-Jacques

*Image from Paris Perdu blog*

When Saul Bellow was living in Paris in 1947, one morning, watching city workers opening the valves of hydrants to allow the gushing water to sweep clean the pavements, he asked himself, “why not have as much freedom of movement as this running water? Subject and language appeared at the same moment—I was enriched with words,” Bellow recalled. “I found myself with magical suddenness writing the first paragraph. It rushed out of me.” Director Charles Newell was inspired by Bellow’s recollection.

**Photos**

Choreography workshop with Thusnelda Mercy and Pascal Merighi

Photo by Joe Mazza, 2019

**Photo**

Charles Newell

Photo by Joe Mazza, 2019

**Photo**

Charles Newell

Photo by Joe Mazza, 2019

**Bio**

The Marilyn F. Vitale Artistic Director of Court Theatre, Charles “Charlie” Newell, has been Artistic Director at Court Theatre since 1994, where he has directed over fifty productions. He made his Chicago directorial debut in 1993 with *The Triumph of Love*, which won the Joseph Jefferson Award for Best Production. Newell has been nominated for sixteen Joseph Jefferson Director Awards, winning four times. Additionally, in 2018, Court Theatre received a special Joseph Jefferson Award for “extraordinary commitment to the Chicago theatre community for over fifty years.”

Newell won the Theatre Communications Group’s Alan Schneider Director Award in 1992, the League of Chicago Theatres’ Artistic Achievement Award in 2012, and the Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation awarded Newell with their Zelda Fichandler Award, which they give to

honor “an outstanding director or choreographer who is transforming the regional arts landscape through singular creativity and artistry in theatre.”

Newell’s directorial highlights at Court include *All My Sons*, *The Hard Problem*, *Man in the Ring*, *One Man, Two Guvnors*, *Satchmo at the Waldorf*, *Agamemnon*, *The Secret Garden*, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, *M. Butterfly*, *The Misanthrope*, *Tartuffe*, *Proof*, *Angels in America*, *An Iliad*, *Porgy and Bess*, *Three Tall Women*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Arcadia*, *Uncle Vanya*, *Raisin*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Travesties*, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, *The Invention of Love*, and *Hamlet*. Charlie has also directed at Goodman Theatre, Guthrie Theater, Arena Stage, John Houseman’s The Acting Company, the California and Alabama Shakespeare Festivals, Juilliard, and New York University. His opera directing credits include *Regina* (Lyric Opera), *Rigoletto* (Opera Theatre of St. Louis), *Don Giovanni* and *The Jewel Box* (Chicago Opera Theater), and *Carousel* (Glimmerglass).

Newell has served on the Board of the Theatre Communications Group, as well as on several panels for the National Endowment for the Arts.

## iPad: Dialect

### Dialect Samples

A crucial step in the process of adapting *The Adventures of Augie March* for the stage was training 21st-century actors to speak with the rhythms and intonations of mid-20th-century characters. Court Theatre searched for a range of historic audio-recordings that would help members of the acting company to recreate the vocal intonations and speech styles of people who came of age in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s.

An excellent resource for this dialect coaching work was the archive of 1959-1961 audio-recordings created by television journalist and news commentator Mike Wallace. Housed at Syracuse University's Special Collections Research Center, the Mike Wallace Collection holds original tapes of Wallace’s on-screen interviews with hundreds of mid-century American writers, artists, athletes, politicians and other public figures. Audio-recordings from the Wallace Collection helped shape the dialects of numerous characters in *The Adventures of Augie March*.

The writers Ben Hecht and Meyer Levin, born in Chicago in the years 1893 and 1905 respectively, were a strong match for the character William Einhorn.

Ben Hecht 0 to :36

Meyer Levin :37 to 1:29

The actor Anthony Quinn, born in 1915 in Chihuahua, Mexico, offers a vocal cue for the character Padilla.

Anthony Quinn 1:29-2:15

Boxers Joe Louis and Tony Galento, each born before WWI, provide a basis for “Nails” Nagel’s dialect work.

Joe Louis 2:15-2:27

Tony Galento 2:27 to 2:50

The California-born, pioneering female aviator Jaqueline Cochran—she was the first woman to break the sound barrier—is a source of vocal inspiration for the character Mimi.

Jaqueline Cochran 2:50-3:24

## CASE: JOHN CULBERT/SET DESIGN

### **Andreas Feininger**

*Feininger's Chicago, 1941*

New York: Dover Publications, 1980

*On loan from Court Theatre*

“Andreas Feininger’s photographs of Chicago at mid-century were a source of inspiration for our set design process. As Augie described Chicago, and how he experienced Chicago, it is not necessarily a warm and friendly place. It is more like what Feininger captured here: the city has an industrial quality, a bustling quality, but it is also gritty. We were attracted to the high contrast in Feininger’s pictures, to the light and dark, to the shafts of light cutting through space, and to the industrial, active feel of the street scenes. In our final set design, the framing of the El train not only defines the edges of our space, but it also says ‘Chicago’ without being too overt. So, the set is able to convey that the frame of our story is indeed Chicago, just as the first lines of the novel tell us that Chicago is the frame.” –John Culbert

[Reproduction pages]

### **Andreas Feininger**

*Feininger's Chicago, 1941*

New York: Dover Publications, 1980

### **Set Model**

*The Adventures of Augie March*

*On loan from Court Theatre*

“Books play an important role in the world of Augie March. Clearly, one of the things that informs and empowers Augie is that he has read all of the great world literature, voraciously, it appears. So, I asked, ‘Is there a way that we could incorporate that idea into our world?’ I had an early version of the set with a floor that was composed of a bunch of pages of the novel, just as if you had ripped up the book and thrown it across the floor. It’s not as if someone would go up and read the floor—though at Court Theatre someone from the audience probably would do that—but the pages gave a texture and quality such that you’d know language is important in the world of the play. But in the end, instead of papering the floor with pages from the novel, we decided to use Bellow’s own handwriting, taken from the archives, as a design element. We superimposed passages from his *Augie March* writer’s notebooks onto the El tracks that frame the stage.” –John Culbert

### **Photo**

John Culbert

Photo by Joe Mazza, 2019

### **Bio**

Chicago-based scenic and lighting designer, John Culbert has designed scenery and lighting for Buckingham Fountain, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Goodman Theatre, Northlight Theatre, Lookingglass Theatre, Garfield Conservatory, Field Museum of Natural History, Drury Lane Theatre, Timeline Theatre, Victory Gardens Theater, Chicago Children's Theatre, Chicago Opera Theatre, Writers Theatre, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, and over forty productions at Court Theatre.

His recent Court productions include *All My Sons*, *The Hard Problem*, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, *Agamemnon*, *Man in the Ring*, *Invisible Man*, *Satchmo at the Waldorf*, *The Secret Garden*, *The Misanthrope*, *Tartuffe*, and *Porgy and Bess*. Highlights from past years include *The Triumph of Love*, *Man of La Mancha*, *Carousel*, *Caroline or Change*, *The Year of Magical Thinking*, *Travesties*, and *Hamlet*.

Other recent Chicago productions include Writers Theater's *Twelfth Night* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*; the Goodman Theatre's *Objects in the Mirror*, *Having Our Say*, and *Two Trains Running*; Northlight Theatre's *Faceless* and *White Guy on the Bus*; and Timeline Theatre's *Chimerica* and *Juno*.

Culbert has received Joseph Jefferson Awards, including one for the lighting Court Theatre's *The Illusion* and another for Goodman Theatre's *Mirror of the Invisible World*. Culbert serves as dean of The Theatre School at DePaul University.

## Quotes

*Why did you go for a more abstract representation of Augie's family home?*

You can build a house, you can't build a home...we don't want the audience worried about the details, we want them worried about Augie.

*How does Augie describe Chicago and how do you capture his vision of the city?*

Chicago, as he described and experienced Chicago, it's not a warm and friendly place. It has an industrial quality, a bustling quality, a hustle-bustle quality. But it's also gritty, so we're attracted to the high contrast, the shafts of light, the industrial feel, not warm and fuzzy, but active.

*Why is light so important to your stage design for Mexico?*

One of the things that struck Saul Bellow about Mexico was the light, the sort of strength and clarity of the light.

*What is the general concept for the stage design and what inspired it?*

It's going to be theatrically open...it's more like a dance space. One of the key influences on our thinking was Pina Bausch and the way she used ensemble and people to tell pretty complicated stories with big gestures, scenic or physical on stage, but not literally representing a place.

*How does the eagle fit into the abstract style of the play?*

It's the only thing in the script that's not sort of human-based...it's suddenly people interacting with a bird. That automatically moves it from being literal...in the play the eagle plays a very theatrical role where it becomes a character...when characters speak the Bellow language/music...it's actually Augie's mind that's making the characters speak those words...if we're going to have a vocabulary we want to let the audience know ahead of time.

*What is the greatest benefit/gain of using a more abstract design style?*

That's one of the things about not doing it literally is you allow people to put themselves into it...we hope that by telling the story this way everyone can bring their life experiences to it...their imaginations engage and that will help them be engaged by the journey...don't lean back, lean forward and engage...

## CASE: SALLY DOLEMBO/COSTUME DESIGN

### **Sketches, 2018-19**

Sally Dolembó's costume design for *The Adventures of Augie March*  
*On loan from Sally Dolembó*

### **Photo**

Sally Dolembó

Costume Design Process Step 1: These portraits were created first

Costume Design Process Step 2: These sketches followed the initial portraits

Costume Design Process Step 3: Next were preliminary designs

Costume Design Process Step 4: These research collages were done in tandem with preliminary designs

Costume Design Process Step 5: Mid-process work done after preliminary designs and before color sample renderings

Costume Design Process Step 6: Color sample rendering thumbnails done before the finals

Costume Design Process Step 7: Sample rendering in process towards final renderings

Costume Design Process Step 8: Final renderings

### **Added the week of June 24, 2019:**

### **Poncho Sculptures**

Erica Friesen and Jody Schmidt, Court Theatre, 2019

*Aluminum screening, spray paint, zip ties, caulk, screen repair tape*

How do you turn a drawing into a wearable piece of clothing? This was the adaptation challenge facing Erica Friesen, Costume Shop Manager at Court Theatre. Costume Designer Sally Dolembó evoked the move to Mexico in Act III of *The Adventures of Augie March* through costumes. She chose to use colorful metal ponchos that would function both as sculptures and wearable pieces. The designs were then passed on to Friesen, who discovered a way to bring Dolembó's idea to life. Friesen selected aluminum window screening as the poncho material for its lightness, flexibility and capacity to hold its shape on stage. This choice of material presented a new challenge to actor safety, because the screening's sharp edges could scratch or scrape the performers as they moved. To protect the actors from the sharp edges, Friesen and Wardrobe Supervisor Jody Schmidt folded the aluminum, and made the ponchos with a double layer of screening. They used screen repair tape to cover any raw edges. Friesen and

Schmidt spent two weeks constructing and spray-painting the six poncho sculptures. The ponchos were made in three sizes so actors of different heights could comfortably wear them. The final challenge was to maintain the integrity of the poncho sculptures, through repair and repainting, throughout the five-week run of the show.

## **Bio**

Chicago-based costume designer, Sally Dolembó, works in theatre and opera, and is making her Court Theatre design debut with the production of *The Adventures of Augie March*. Dolembó is Head of Costume Design at DePaul University, and previously served as an adjunct faculty member at Northwestern University and Columbia College.

Dolembó received training in sculpture and costume design at Washington University and obtained her MFA from Northwestern University. She was a 2007-08 recipient of a Fulbright Scholarship to study costume design and history in Rome, Italy. While in Rome, she worked at the Italian *sartoria* Tirelli Costumi where she studied historical garments and worked in Tirelli's shop building costumes for opera, film, and theatre. Her research work in Italy built upon her previous study of historical costume and drawings completed in London and Bath, England as part of a Bemis Travel Grant.

Dolembó has designed at a variety of theatre companies, including Lyric Opera of Chicago, Kentucky Opera, American Theatre Company, Steppenwolf Theatre, Second City, Lookingglass Theatre, Paramount Theatre, Drury Lane Theatre, Timeline Theatre, Northlight Theatre, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Porchlight Music Theatre, Gift Theatre, Steep Theatre, The Hypocrites, Haven Theatre, The Marriott Theatre, and Wolf Trap Opera. Her recent costume design credits include, *The Barber of Seville*, *Holiday Inn*, *Newsies*, *She Loves Me*, *The Bridges of Madison County*, *L'Opera Seria*, *Second Nature*, *#DateMe*, *The Little Prince*, *A Christmas Story: The Musical*, *Peter and the Starcatcher*, *Next to Normal*, *1984*, *The Book Thief*, *A Disappearing Number*, and *Chimerica*.

[www.sallydolembó.com](http://www.sallydolembó.com)

## **Quotes**

*What is your general design process for any show?*

I'll usually read the play a few times before I start making notes—a character analysis or themes that are popping up, sometimes clothing. Then I'll do a script analysis at that point from a dramaturgical standpoint. Then once I go through that, I'll do what I call 'what we know' document. It's basically just like a list of everything we know about a character from what they say about themselves, what somebody else in the play has said about them or what the playwright says via stage directions. Once I go through all of that, I'll start, um, some visual research. I'll research the city, the time period. And then I do other visual research what I call emotional research. So it might be a piece of photography or a painting that evokes an emotional quality of the play. I'll do then specific character and clothing research and start sketching.

*How did you arrive at the simpler design for Augie?*

We'd become really interested in the movement quality of Pina Bausch and some of the dance work we were looking at. And we knew at that point that we wanted to embrace the sort of abstraction and emotional dive that movement work would take. So we looked at all of these sketches and thought, this is too much. There's too many pieces of clothing—an actor has to go from this look to



that look immediately. But it was a starting place to distill out what was working about each of those looks or silhouettes. And so I did more research on dancewear and Pina Bausch because she does a lot of dance where people are wearing formal clothing. So in thinking that way, we started leaning more into like the idea of a dance ensemble. All of the men will be wearing flicks, simple dress shirts and pants in a very constrained color palette, like grays and blue-grays to evoke the gritty Chicago. And then the women, similarly, will be in dresses that are very simple echoes of the 1930s and 1940s period silhouette dresses. But then when we do want to add a costume piece, it's because we're trying to tell a story—we're trying to evoke an emotional response from the audience or highlight, emotionally, what's going on in the piece.

*What were the challenges that came about from this distillation to a simpler design? What did you gain?*

I'm a lover of costume history and have loved all of the nuanced details that Bellow puts in the novel about clothing—specific things about a hairstyle and the way people wore things, not only what they were wearing, but how they were laying on the body. It was hard for me to let go of all of that specificity and embrace this abstracted distilled version. But once I did, it was so freeing. I think simple works for a few reasons. On a practical level, people have to change from character to character immediately. On an artistic level, I think it works because, at least for me, the way I see it is that Augie is sort of being manipulated and molded by all the people in his life through all of the experiences he's having in different ways. In a way he, he's a blank canvas that we see grow into adulthood. And so the fact that, essentially, we're treating the entire cast as a blank canvas allows us to have more impact and storytelling when we add a piece on to that plane. So we add a coat or we add a hat, and all of a sudden it just means so much more.

*How do you approach costume design for an adaptation?*

I've worked on several adaptations before and I think it's important to always remind yourself this is not the novel. Why are we doing this as a play? Going back to like my old days in school, we would talk about the form, the content and the style of the piece. So why does this form of a play, why does this form of dramatic literature, work for this? And what would we be missing by doing this as a play versus a novel?